



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of the Media

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 16, 2003

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

We, join Mr. Duve in sharing an extreme concern about the developments in Turkmenistan, as has been illustrated by our invoking of the Moscow Mechanism.

We also join him in the concerns he has expressed today about the misuse of the media in the wake of the incident on November 25th.

As he points out, Turkmen media broadcast supposed "reenactments", and I put that word in quotes, of the events of November 25th, reportedly as proof to be used against those charged in connection with the attack. Such broadcasts do not constitute any kind of admissible proof in a court of law.

Moreover, as Mr. Duve also reminds us, Turkmen television has broadcast "confessions" by several of those charged. We have credible reports that these "confessions" were obtained through torture. We call on the Government of Turkmenistan to cooperate with the Moscow Mechanism, including an investigation of these allegations of torture.

The United States, too, is following closely the trial of Kazakh journalist, Sergey Duvanov. We urge the Kazakh authorities to ensure that the trial is fair, open, and transparent.

In Kyrgyzstan, we are also concerned about the situation of Moya Stolitsa, a Russian-language independent newspaper. The newspaper faces more than a dozen lawsuits filed in December and January. Some of the claimants are high-level Kyrgyz officials; these include the Prime Minister and the Minister of Internal Affairs.

The United States is concerned that the suits are part of a politically motivated campaign to shut that newspaper down. We will be closely following any court proceedings in this case.

Elsewhere in the OSCE region, we are witnessing continuous incidents of harassment, libel suits, arrests, disappearances, and even deaths of journalists. We urge all governments concerned to provide information on the cases at hand and to promote accountability for these abuses.

In Azerbaijan, we are concerned by a rash of lawsuits against the media. In the past two months 15 lawsuits have been filed against Azeri newspapers.

In Belarus, the continued suppression of the newspaper, Myestnoye vremya, is part of a pattern of abuses aimed apparently at silencing the independent media. The U. S. calls upon Belarus to allow this newspaper and others to provide its citizens with an independent voice.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.